CHAPTER IX

FORCE

> However, ’tis expedient to be wary:
> Indifference, certes, don’t produce distress;
> And rash enthusiasm in good society
> Were nothing but a moral inebriety.
>
> —BYRON, *Don Juan.*

You have attended plays that seemed fair, yet they did not move you, grip you. In theatrical parlance, they failed to “get over,” which means that their message did not get over the foot-lights to the audience. There was no punch, no jab to them—they had no force.

Of course, all this spells disaster, in big letters, not only in a stage production but in any platform effort. Every such presentation exists solely for the audience, and if it fails to hit them—and the expression is a good one—it has no excuse for living; nor will it live long.

What is Force?

Some of our most obvious words open up secret meanings under scrutiny, and this is one of them.

To begin with, we must recognize the distinction between inner and outer force. The one is cause, the other effect. The one is spiritual, the other physical. In this important particular, animate force differs from inanimate force—the power of man, coming from within and expressing itself outwardly, is of another sort from the force of Shimose powder, which awaits some influence from without to explode it. However susceptive to outside stimuli, the true source of power in man lies within himself. This

may seem like “mere psychology,” but it has an intensely practical bearing on public speaking, as will appear.

Not only must we discern the difference between human force and mere physical force, but we must not confuse its real essence with some of the things that may—and may not—accompany it. For example, loudness is not force, though force at times may be attended by noise. Mere roaring never made a good speech, yet there are moments—moments, mind you, not minutes—when big voice power may be used with tremendous effect.

Nor is violent motion force—yet force may result in violent motion. Hamlet counseled the players:

> Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus; but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance, that may give it smoothness. Oh, it offends me to the soul, to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings[1]; who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb show, and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o’er-doing Termagant; it out-herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.
>
> Be not too tame, neither, but let your discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first, and now, was, and is, to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to Nature, to show Virtue her own feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of the which one must, in your allowance, o’erweigh a whole theater of others. Oh, there be players that I have seen play—and heard others praise, and that highly—not to speak it profanely, that, neither having the accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, or man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature’s journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.[1]

Force is both a cause and an effect. Inner force, which must precede outer force, is a combination of four elements, acting progressively. First of all, *force arises from conviction.* You must be convinced of the truth, or the importance, or the meaning, of what you are about to say before you can give it forceful delivery. It must lay strong hold upon your convictions before it can grip your audience. Conviction convinces.

The Saturday Evening Post in an article on "England's T. R."—Winston Spencer Churchill—attributed much of Churchill's and Roosevelt's public platform success to their forceful delivery. No matter what is in hand, these men make themselves believe for the time being that that one thing is the most important on earth. Hence they speak to their audiences in a Do-this-or-you-*PERISH* manner.

That kind of speaking wins, and it is that virile, strenuous, aggressive attitude which both distinguishes and maintains the platform careers of our greatest leaders.

But let us look a little closer at the origins of inner force. How does conviction affect the man who feels it? We have answered the inquiry in the very question itself—he *feels* it: *Conviction produces emotional tension.* Study the pictures of Theodore Roosevelt and of Billy Sunday in action—*action* is the word. Note the tension of their jaw muscles, the taut lines of sinews in their entire bodies when reaching a climax of force. Moral and physical force are alike in being both preceded and accompanied by in-*tens*-ity—tension—tightness of the cords of power.

It is this tautness of the bow-string, this knotting of the muscles, this contraction before the spring, that makes an audience *feel*—almost see—the reserve power in a speaker. In some really wonderful way it is more what a speaker does *not* say and do that reveals the dynamo within. *Anything* may come from such stored-up force once it is let loose; and that keeps an audience alert, hanging on the lips of a speaker for his next word. After all, it is all a question of manhood, for a stuffed doll has neither convictions nor emotional tension. If you are upholstered with sawdust, keep off the platform, for your own speech will puncture you.

Growing out of this conviction-tension comes *resolve to make the audience share that conviction-tension.* Purpose is the backbone of force; without it speech is flabby—it may glitter, but it is the iridescence of the

spineless jellyfish. You must hold fast to your resolve if you would hold fast to your audience.

Finally, all this conviction-tension-purpose is lifeless and useless unless it results in *propulsion.* You remember how Young in his wonderful "Night Thoughts" delineates the man who

> Pushes his prudent purpose to resolve,
> Resolves, and re-resolves, and dies the same.

Let not your force "die a-borning,"—bring it to full life in its conviction, emotional tension, resolve, and propulsive power.

Can Force be Acquired?

Yes, if the acquirer has any such capacities as we have just outlined. How to acquire this vital factor is suggested in its very analysis: Live with your subject until you are convinced of its importance.

If your message does not of itself arouse you to tension, *PULL* yourself together. When a man faces the necessity of leaping across a crevasse he does not wait for inspiration, he *wills* his muscles into tensity for the spring —it is not without purpose that our English language uses the same word to depict a mighty though delicate steel contrivance and a quick leap through the air. Then resolve—and let it all end in actual *punch.*

This truth is worth reiteration: The man within is the final factor. He must supply the fuel. The audience, or even the man himself, may add the match—it matters little which, only so that there be fire. However skillfully your engine is constructed, however well it works, you will have no force if the fire has gone out under the boiler. It matters little how well you have mastered poise, pause, modulation, and tempo, if your speech lacks fire it is dead. Neither a dead engine nor a dead speech will move anybody.

Four factors of force are measurably within your control, and in that far may be acquired: *ideas, feeling about the subject, wording,* and *delivery.*

Each of these is more or less fully discussed in this volume, except wording, which really requires a fuller rhetorical study than can here be ventured. It is, however, of the utmost importance that you should be aware of precisely how wording bears upon force in a sentence. Study "The Working Principles of Rhetoric," by John Franklin Genung, or the rhetorical treatises of Adams Sherman Hill, of Charles Sears Baldwin, or any others whose names may easily be learned from any teacher.

Here are a few suggestions on the use of words to attain force:

Choice of Words

PLAIN words are more forceful than words less commonly used—*juggle* has more vigor than *prestidigitate.*

SHORT words are stronger than long words—*end* has more directness than *terminate.*

SAXON words are usually more forceful than Latinistic words—for force, use *wars against* rather than *militate against.*

SPECIFIC words are stronger than general words—*pressman* is more definite than *printer.*

CONNOTATIVE words, those that suggest more than they say, have more power than ordinary words—"She *let* herself be married" expresses more than "She *married.*"

EPITHETS, figuratively descriptive words, are more effective than direct names—"Go tell that *old fox,*" has more "punch" than "Go tell that *sly fellow.*"

Choice

ONOMATOPOETIC

Choice of Words

ONOMATOPOETIC words, words that convey the sense by the sound, are more powerful than other words—*crash* is more effective than *cataclysm*.

Arrangement of Words

Cut out modifiers.

Cut out connectives.

Begin with words that demand attention.

"End with words that deserve distinction," says Prof. Barrett Wendell.

Set strong ideas over against weaker ones, so as to gain strength by the contrast.

Avoid elaborate sentence structure—short sentences are stronger than long ones.

Cut out every useless word, so as to give prominence to the really important ones.

Let each sentence be a condensed battering ram, swinging to its final blow on the attention.

A familiar, homely idiom, if not worn by much use, is more effective than a highly formal, scholarly expression.

Consider well the relative value of different positions in the sentence so that you may give the prominent place to ideas you wish to emphasize.

“But,” says someone, “is it not more honest to depend on the inherent interest in a subject, its native truth, clearness and sincerity of presentation, and beauty of utterance, to win your audience? Why not charm men instead of capturing them by assault?”

Why Use Force?

There is much truth in such an appeal, but not all the truth. Clearness, persuasion, beauty, simple statement of truth, are all essential—indeed, they are all definite parts of a forceful presentment of a subject, without being the only parts. Strong meat may not be as attractive as ices, but all depends on the appetite and the stage of the meal.

You can not deliver an aggressive message with caressing little strokes. No! Jab it in with hard, swift solar plexus punches. You cannot strike fire from flint or from an audience with love taps. Say to a crowded theatre in a lackadaisical manner: “It seems to me that the house is on fire,” and your announcement may be greeted with a laugh. If you flash out the words: “The house’s on fire!” they will crush one another in getting to the exits.

The spirit and the language of force are definite with conviction. No immortal speech in literature contains such expressions as “it seems to me,” “I should judge,” “in my opinion,” “I suppose,” “perhaps it is true.” The speeches that will live have been delivered by men ablaze with the courage of their convictions, who uttered their words as eternal truth. Of Jesus it was said that “the common people heard Him gladly.” Why? “He taught them as one having *AUTHORITY.”* An audience will never be moved by what “seems” to you to be truth or what in your “humble opinion” may be so. If you honestly can, assert convictions as your conclusions. Be sure you are right before you speak your speech, then utter your thoughts as though they were a Gibraltar of unimpeachable *truth.* Deliver them with the iron hand and confidence of a Cromwell. Assert them with the fire of *authority.*

Pronounce them as an *ultimatum.* If you cannot speak with conviction, be silent.

What force did that young minister have who, fearing to be too dogmatic, thus exhorted his hearers: “My friends—as I assume that you are—it appears to be my duty to tell you that if you do not repent, so to speak, forsake your sins, as it were, and turn to righteousness, if I may so express it, you will be lost, in a measure”?

Effective speech must reflect the era. This is not a rose water age, and a tepid, half-hearted speech will not win. This is the century of trip hammers, of overland expresses that dash under cities and through mountain tunnels, and you must instill this spirit into your speech if you would move a popular audience. From a front seat listen to a first-class company present a modern Broadway drama—not a comedy, but a gripping, thrilling drama. Do not become absorbed in the story; reserve all your attention for the technique and the force of the acting. There is a kick and a crash as well as an infinitely subtle intensity in the big, climax-speeches that suggest this lesson: the same well-calculated, restrained, delicately shaded force would simply *rivet* your ideas in the minds of your audience. An air-gun will rattle bird-shot against a window pane—it takes a rifle to wing a bullet through plate glass and the oaken walls beyond.

When to Use Force

An audience is unlike the kingdom of heaven—the violent do not always take it by force. There are times when beauty and serenity should be the only bells in your chime. Force is only one of the great extremes of contrast—use neither it nor quiet utterance to the exclusion of other tones: be various, and in variety find even greater force than you could attain by attempting its constant use. If you are reading an essay on the beauties of the dawn, talking about the dainty bloom of a honey-suckle, or explaining the mechanism of a gas engine, a vigorous style of delivery is entirely out

of place. But when you are appealing to wills and consciences for immediate action, forceful delivery wins. In such cases, consider the minds of your audience as so many safes that have been locked and the keys lost. Do not try to figure out the combinations. Pour a little nitro glycerine into the cracks and light the fuse. As these lines are being written a contractor down the street is clearing away the rocks with dynamite to lay the foundations for a great building. When you want to get action, do not fear to use dynamite.

The final argument for the effectiveness of force in public speech is the fact that everything must be enlarged for the purposes of the platform—that is why so few speeches read well in the reports on the morning after: Statements appear crude and exaggerated because they are unaccompanied by the forceful delivery of a glowing speaker before an audience heated to attentive enthusiasm. So in preparing your speech you must not err on the side of mild statement—your audience will inevitably tone down your words in the cold grey of afterthought. When Phidias was criticised for the rough, bold outlines of a figure he had submitted in competition, he smiled and asked that his statue and the one wrought by his rival should be set upon the column for which the sculpture was destined. When this was done all the exaggerations and crudities, toned by distances, melted into exquisite grace of line and form. Each speech must be a special study in suitability and proportion.

Omit the thunder of delivery, if you will, but like Wendell Phillips put “silent lightning” into your speech. Make your thoughts breathe and your words burn. Birrell said: “Emerson writes like an electrical cat emitting sparks and shocks in every sentence.” Go thou and speak likewise. Get the “big stick” into your delivery—be forceful.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Illustrate, by repeating a sentence from memory, what is meant by employing force in speaking.

2. Which in your opinion is the most important of the technical principles of speaking that you have studied so far? Why?

3. What is the effect of too much force in a speech? Too little?

4. Note some uninteresting conversation or ineffective speech, and tell why it failed.

5. Suggest how it might be improved.

6. Why do speeches have to be spoken with more force than do conversations?

7. Read aloud the selection on page 84, using the technical principles outlined in chapters III to VIII, but neglect to put any force behind the interpretation. What is the result?

8. Reread several times, doing your best to achieve force.

9. Which parts of the selection on page 84 require the most force?

10. Write a five-minute speech not only discussing the errors of those who exaggerate and those who minimize the use of force, but by imitation show their weaknesses. Do not burlesque, but closely imitate.

11. Give a list of ten themes for public addresses, saying which seem most likely to require the frequent use of force in delivery.

12. In your own opinion, do speakers usually err from the use of too much or too little force?

13. Define (a) bombast; (b) bathos; (c) sentimentality; (d) squeamish.

14. Say how the foregoing words describe weaknesses in public speech.

15. Recast in twentieth-century English “Hamlet’s Directions to the Players,” page 88.

16. Memorize the following extracts from Wendell Phillips’ speeches, and deliver them with the force of Wendell Phillips’ “silent lightning” delivery.

We are for a revolution! We say in behalf of these hunted beings, whom God created, and who law-abiding Webster and Winthrop have sworn shall not find shelter in Massachusetts,—we say that they may make their little motions, and pass their little laws in Washington, but that Faneuil Hall repeals them in the name of humanity and the old Bay State!

. . . . . .

My advice to workingmen is this:

If you want power in this country; if you want to make yourselves felt; if you do not want your children to wait long years before they have the bread on the table they ought to have, the leisure in their lives they ought to have, the opportunities in life they ought to have; if you don't want to wait yourselves,—write on your banner, so that every political trimmer can read it, so that every politician, no matter how short-sighted he may be, can read it, *"WE NEVER FORGET!* If you launch the arrow of sarcasm at labor, *WE NEVER FORGET!* If there is a division in Congress, and you throw your vote in the wrong scale, *WE NEVER FORGET!* You may go down on your knees, and say, 'I am sorry I did the act'—but we will say *'IT WILL AVAIL YOU IN HEAVEN TO BE SORRY, BUT ON THIS SIDE OF THE GRAVE, NEVER!'"* So that a man in taking up the labor question will know he is dealing with a hair-trigger pistol, and will say, "I am to be true to justice and to man; otherwise I am a dead duck."

. . . . . .

In Russia there is no press, no debate, no explanation of what government does, no remonstrance allowed, no agitation of public issues. Dead silence, like that which reigns at the summit of Mont Blanc, freezes the whole empire, long ago described as "a despotism tempered by assassination." Meanwhile, such despotism has unsettled the brains of the ruling family, as unbridled power doubtless made some of the twelve Cæsars insane; a madman, sporting with the lives and comfort of a hundred millions of men. The young girl whispers in her mother's ear, under a ceiled roof, her pity for a brother knouted and dragged half dead into exile for his opinions. The next week she is stripped naked and flogged to death in the public square. No inquiry, no explanation, no trial, no protest, one dead uniform silence, the law of the tyrant. Where is there ground for any hope of peaceful change? No, no! in such a land dynamite and the dagger are the necessary and proper substitutes for Faneuil Hall. Anything that will make the madman quake in his bedchamber, and rouse his victims into reckless and desperate resistance. This is the only view an American, the child of 1620 and 1776, can take of Nihilism. Any other unsettles and perplexes the ethics of our civilization.

Born within sight of Bunker Hill—son of Harvard, whose first pledge was "Truth," citizen of a republic based on the claim that no government is rightful unless resting on the consent of the people, and which assumes to lead in asserting the rights of humanity—I at least can say nothing else and nothing less—no, not if every tile on Cambridge roofs were a devil hooting my words!

For practise on forceful selections, use "The Irrepressible Conflict," page 67; "Abraham Lincoln," page 76; "Pass Prosperity Around," page 470; "A Plea for Cuba," page 50.

[1] Those who sat in the pit, or parquet.

[1] *Hamlet,* Act III, Scene 2.